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Parangolés and dancing gazes²

O parangolé e a dança dos olhares

Abstract

In this article, we analyse a photograph of Hélio Oiticica taken by the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro during the filming of Ivan Cardoso's documentary about Oiticica. In this photograph, on first sight, the scene from Ivan Cardoso's film is quite unlike Viveiros de Castro's photograph in that the former integrates with community and environment whereas the photo does not. While Cardoso focuses on Oiticica himself (it was no coincidence that titles of his short films came from the latter's name) or on people wearing parangolés, as a way to draw attention to the "internalization of experience" – to borrow a formulation from Guy Brett –, Viveiros de Castro aims to place the artist in this relation and in a certain sense underscores the "externalization of experience".

Keywords

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Photograph. Hélio Oiticica. Parangolé.

Resumo

Neste artigo, parte-se da análise detalhada de uma fotografia de Hélio Oiticica feita pelo antropólogo Eduardo Viveiros de Castro durante as filmagens do documentário H.O., de Ivan Cardoso, em que há, à primeira vista, uma nítida diferença entre a cena do filme de Cardoso e a fotografia de Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. É pela integração da comunidade e do entorno que esta se distancia daquela. Enquanto Ivan Cardoso centra-se na figura de Oiticica (não por acaso, os títulos de seus curtas derivam do nome do artista) ou nas daqueles que vestem os parangolés, chamando a atenção para a "interiorização da experiência" – para tomarmos emprestada uma formulação de Guy Brett –, Viveiros de Castro preocupa-se em colocar o artista em relação, enfatizando, em certo sentido, a "exteriorização da experiência".

Keywords Palavras-chave

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Fotografia. Hélio Oiticica. Parangolé.

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1- Guy Brett wrote: "At some point, they [parangolé capes] may also suggest life's beginnings and endings, the amniotic sac around an unborn baby and at the same time the sinuous tissue of the dead." (HO, São Paulo: Paulo Kuczynski Escritório de Arte, 2006, p. 9).

2- A parangolé was a "delta wing to ecstasy" for Haroldo de Campos (interviewed by Lenora de Barros, "O voo da razão sensível de Hélio Oiticica", *Folha de S. Paulo*, July 26, 1987, A55). For Nuno Ramos, the parangolé was an ascensional typhoon shape ["forma-tufão ascension-al"] ("À espera de um sol interno [Hélio Oiticica]", *Ensaio geral*, São Paulo: Globo, 2007, p. 132). More recently, Gonzalo Aguilar, has contrasted parangolés with the bólido [fireball] honoring Cara de Cavalo and notes: "There are no parangolés without living bodies. The dancing body negates a drapé tombé by lifting up colored fabrics and interacting with air" (Hélio Oiticica: a asa branca do êxtase, Rio de Janeiro: Anfiteatro, 2016, p. 63). Oiticica himself had noted that wearing a cape made the body of a a carnival-samba dancer as free as a comet flying through empty space: "O passista e a capa liberam o corpo qual cometa / q rola por espaços livres" ("Ondas do corpo", *Encontros Hélio Oiticica*, Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009, p. 193).

3- Identification based not only on looking at the parangolés themselves – hindered by the absence of color in the photograph – but also Hélio Oiticica's notebook. See "HO, por Ivan Cardoso", *Programa HO* # 0089/79. All references from Programa Hélio Oiticica below will be in this format.

4- See Hélio Oiticica, "HO, por Ivan Cardoso", op. cit.

A black-and-white photograph dated May 1979 shows Hélio Oiticica foregrounded in mid-image. He is lying on his side on the beaten earth of a small clearing at the foot of one of the many steep lanes leading up to the hillside favela of Morro da Mangueira. In his right hand, Hélio is holding the bulky straw-filled tip of *Parangolé P17 Capa 13* (1967). A colorless strip of nylon painted with the words "I am possessed" is overlapping Oiticica's face and part of his chest, only partly covered by a dark-colored strip of fabric belonging to the same parangolé fastened to his left shoulder. His left hand rests on his jeans, his pose suggests stillness – or at first sight even a dead body¹ – which would contrast with the usual depictions of his parangolés as constantly in motion, and particularly in ascending motion.² Oiticica is barefoot, like most of the seven young men standing in the background. Five of them are also wearing parangolés, which I shall attempt to identify³ from left to right: *Parangolé P15 Capa 11 Incorporo a revolta* [*P15 Parangolé Cape 11 I incorporate revolt*] (1967), worn by Nildo, *Parangolé P32 Capa 25* (1973), *Parangolé P16 Capa 12 Da adversidade vivemos* [*P16 Parangolé Cape 12 On Adversity we Thrive*] (1967), worn by Paulo Ramos (toward the middle), *Parangolé P10 Capa 6* (1965-66), dedicated to Mosquito (worn by a boy in shorts who may be Mosquito himself or perhaps Nildo's son Fábio⁴) and *Parangolé P4 Capa 1* (1964). The five boys are standing in a semicircle around a mound of compacted sand. Nobody – not even the dog – seems to be showing any interest in Oiticica: they are all looking sideways, thus creating a strange composition of gazes, or lines of sight. At the ends of the semicircle are Nildo on the left and the boy wearing *Parangolé P4 Capa 1* to the right. Their silhouetted inward looking faces distract viewers' eyes from Oiticica, for a moment at least, to look at the group of boys: Nildo is staring at the ground or the dog, while the other is staring at the young man who is not only looking at Nildo but also stretching his right arm towards him, perhaps pointing to the person whose legs are seen walking away behind Nildo. Paulo Ramos is on a slight elevation that makes him look taller than the others. His hand is clasped to his chest like a sentry and he is looking at something a few meters to the left of the photographer and out of the camera's field of view. Beside him is the boy with the parangolé honoring Mosquito, who seems to be looking in the same direction. With its whole body askew, mongrel eyes something in front of it but outside the photograph. Away from the semicircle, to the right, are two more boys, the only ones not wearing parangolés: their shorts are the same as the Brazilian soccer team's. The boy more to the left is wearing a T-shirt, the other a shirt. They are leaning against each other toward the edge of the scene, like the onlookers in old historical or biblical pictures, who do not seem to be part of the central event but are visibly interested in it, thus recalling the five Florentines to the left and four figures on the right in Masaccio's *Raising of the Son of Theophilus and St Peter Enthroned* (1427-80, completed by Filippino Lippi), probably a self-portrait with his friends Brunelleschi, Alberti and Masolino). These characters are not at center-stage. In terms of the photograph, it is the absence of a parangolé as well as their position more to one side that situates them on the edge of a triangle formed by Oiticica on the ground and the five boys in a semicircle. So

why are they there? To watch. Like us, they are onlookers. Through their gaze, one might say, we too enter the image. While the boy wearing shirt watches the five boys in parangolé, the one wearing T-shirt is the only person in the photograph that gazes at Oiticica on the ground. On the top left, barely distinguished against the background, a half-naked boy appears almost as a specter, who seems more interested in the large number of people in attendance than in Oiticica's performance. Another boy may be seen behind five or six individuals situated further back on the higher part of the land. We do not know whether they are looking at the scene since all we see is their legs. At least one of these individuals seems to be wearing a parangolé. The others are like us: onlookers.

Viveiros de Castro's photograph is one of the stills he shot for Ivan Cardoso's film H.O. [for Hélio Oiticica] The related scene was left out of the edited footage but turned up decades later in Heliorama, a film Ivan Cardoso made in 2004 using previously taken sequences, many of them never screened before. From 10"32' to 10"55' of Heliorama, Oiticica is rolling on the ground wearing a parangolé (P17 Capa 13) while constantly trying to keep the nylon band bearing the words "I am possessed" over his face. Like the photograph, the scene was shot in black and white and on three planes, not necessarily in the same order as the events themselves took place. In the foreground, Oiticica is shown twirling on beaten earth in the lower flat area of the clearing. In the mid-distance, he rolls down from the top of the sand mound. Further towards the background, the same middle-distance action is repeated. The difference is that, in addition to Oiticica, we see one of the boys' thin legs covered with a piece of cloth, probably from a parangolé. Contrasting the photograph's wide shot, the film closes in on Oiticica, setting him apart from his environment and the surrounding community. Oiticica now appears in the foreground, this time in a mid shot. Most of Heliorama's scenes featuring somebody wearing a parangolé are close-ups of the individuals and the landscape is barely seen. Even in the sequence of Oiticica dancing under a marquee with his *Bólido saco 4 B52* *Teu amor eu guardo aqui* [B52 Fireball Bag 4 B52 Your love I keep here] (1966), there are no other living bodies around. The same goes for H.O., which was made and released in that same year as the photograph. His parangolé sequences are close-ups, foreground or medium shots – except for full-length images of Nildo dancing with *Parangolé P4 Capa 1* [P4 Parangolé Cape 1] in front of a wall painted with the Brazilian flag and watched by a brunette in shorts and bandeau top, and finally Oiticica with *Bólido saco 4 B52* [B52 Fireball Bag 4) at the end of the film.

On first sight, the scene from Ivan Cardoso's film is quite unlike Viveiros de Castro's photograph in that the former integrates with community and environment whereas the photo does not. While Cardoso focuses on Oiticica himself (it was no coincidence that titles of his short films came from the latter's name) or on people wearing parangolés, as a way to draw attention to the "internalization of experience" – to borrow a formulation from Guy Brett –, Viveiros de Castro aims to place the artist in this relation and in a certain sense underscores the "externalization of experience". As Brett notes: "In terms of universal experience, they [parangolé



5- Guy Brett, HO cit., p. 9.

6- Hélio Oiticica, «HO por Ivan Cardoso», Encontros Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro: Azougue, 2009, p. 229.

7- Hélio Oiticica, «Anotações sobre o parangolé», *Aspiro ao grande labirinto*, p. 71. See also Hinterwaldner, «Sensorial, Supra-sensorial, Hélio Sensorial: Analyzing Oiticica in Action», *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, vol. XXXVIII, n. 108, 2016, p. 102.

8- Hélio Oiticica, «Anotações sobre o parangolé» op. cit., p. 71.

9- «Interview with Cigarra», *Encontros Hélio Oiticica*, op. cit., p. 45.

10- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, «Esboço de cosmologia yawalapíti», *A inconstância da alma selvagem*, São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2002, p. 71-72.

cap[es] become a means of outward-turning declaration and inward-turning self-absorption, freedom and entrapment.”⁵ Oiticica was fond of concomitant or multiple experiences, as he told Ivan Cardoso in H.O.: “Parangolé was not something to put on your body to show off; the experience of one person wearing and another over there watching the former wearing it, or people who wear them simultaneously are simultaneous experiences, multi-experiences.”⁶ One of Oiticica’s earliest writings on the parangolé posited a relationship between two opposed but complementary positions: wearing one and watching somebody else wearing one, thus leading to “the experience of a ‘collective participation’” in *Parangolé*.⁷

“Wearing”, the primary and all-embracing meaning [of the work], is opposed to “watching”, a secondary sense, thus completing the “wearing-watching” circle. Wearing is itself an all-embracing lived experience of the work since by unfolding it while having their own body as central core, viewers are somehow already experiencing the spatial transmutation that goes on there: in their condition as structural core of the work, they perceive the experiential opening out of this intercorporeal space. [...] While watching leads the participant to the objective space-time plane of the work, for the other this plane is dominated by the subjective-experiential aspect; thence the completion of the initial experience of wearing. As an intermediate stage, one could designate wearing-watching, in which by wearing a work the participant sees what is unfolding in an “Other”, who is wearing another work, of course.⁸

Perhaps this was the reason for Oiticica’s response in 1966 when he was asked whether he was “for the individual or for the community”. He replied “For both: there can be no separation in my opinion; they are merely two polarities in a social totality.”⁹

Individual and collective, people who wear and others who watch are all conjugated in the photograph in question. We might wonder whether this was the graduating anthropologist speaking too, rather than just the photographer. In May 1979, Viveiros de Castro had enrolled in a doctorate program in social anthropology at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro’s Museu Nacional, where he had been teaching since the previous year. Two years earlier, he had submitted his dissertation on the Yawalapíti of the Upper Xingu River region, where he had been researching in 1976 -1977. He had also briefly done field work with the Kulina in the Amazon region, in 1978, and the Yanomami in the state of Roraima, in 1979. It was precisely his study of the Yawalapíti that made Viveiros de Castro realize that their culture had to periodically subject the human body to “deliberate processes of fabrication”¹⁰ and that these processes do not take place in isolation, they are

at the very heart of their society: The body is imagined by society in every possible sense of the word."¹¹ So "there is no distinction between corporeal and social: corporeal was social and social was corporeal."¹²

Back to the photograph. The young men outside the semicircle are watching those wearing parangolés and the latter are looking at others, who are also wearing parangolés, or -- as in the case of Paulo Ramos and the boy with the cape dedicated to Mosquito --, looking somewhere outside of the photograph. If, as I mentioned earlier, the two boys on the sidelines are cast as onlookers like ourselves and their vantage point is to some extent our own too, then I think we may infer that the play of eyes-gazes caught in this snapshot includes our own gazes as virtuality: we are there extemporaneously as different witnesses for this "multiple experience". So, there is something of an expansion of the experience of watching – like the timing of a ritual activity.¹³ But what is being watched? Scrutiny of the photograph shows it is divided into two planes: one containing the boys and their play of gazes, and the other for Oiticica. A similar way of image framing may be found in some of the photographs of the Araweté people that Viveiros de Castro shot a couple of years later. In many of his records of shamanism, we see a highly active shaman up front while some of the village dwellers in the background are bearing witness. Even in close-up pictures of the shaman there are others in the background watching his action, although their images are blurred. As in Oiticica's photograph, some witnesses do not seem to be paying attention to what the shaman is doing: some are talking to among themselves, others are looking away, distracted by different tasks, and some children are seen at play.

A comparison of Oiticica's photograph with his images of shamanism among the Araweté is supported by the critical bibliography on the artist. Nuno Ramos had already noted the similarity between parangolés and the practices of shamanism: "Through his guise and his drum, the shaman has access to ecstasy, in an intense analogy with the *Parangolés*."¹⁴ The words on the cape that Oiticica is wearing suggest his flirting with ecstasy, or more precisely with possession,¹⁵ which he saw as a very particular kind of in-corporation [in the sense of embodying]: "This was the key cape for a series I am now making, which I see as revealing the cape as a poetic structural 'in-corporation' – Mário Pedrosa prompted me to see it as 'tribal isolation'!"¹⁶ Talking to Ivan Cardoso, he also specifies: "This is not a question of the body as support for the artwork. On the contrary, it is total in-corporation. It is the body being in-corporated in the work and the work in the body ... I call it in-corporation."¹⁷ Far from equating possession with the takeover of a body by a different entity (demon, spirit, etc.) Oiticica saw in-corporation as a revelation of the "condition of being" as such¹⁸ and explained that the words "I am possessed" on the parangolé "define a characteristic state of mind as if I had in-corporated with it my own consciousness of being, a being that is expressed socially ethically, and politically."¹⁹ Let us not forget that one of the parangolés we see in the photograph is named precisely *Incorpo a revolta* [I in-corporate revolt]. So, one could say that the changes produced in an individual wearing a *parangolé* would

11- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Esboço de cosmologia yawalapiti" Op. cit., p. 72.

12- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "O chocalho do xamã é um acelerador de partículas", interview with Renato Sztutman, Silvana Nascimento, and Stelio Marras, in *Encontros Eduardo Viveiros de Castro*, Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2007, p. 28.

13- Aldo Natale Terrin noted that during a ritual activity time cannot be held up but may be made to pass more slowly. (O rito: antropologia e fenomenologia da ritualidade, translated by José Maria de Almeida, São Paulo: Paulus, 2004, p. 260).

14- Nuno Ramos, "À espera de um sol interno [Hélio Oiticica]" op.cit., p. 135.

15- Several writers have related parangolés to Afro-Brazilian religious practices, e.g. Paulo Herkenhoff, "A Pedra de Raio de Rubem Valentim, Obá-Pintor da Casa de Mãe Senhora", a piece written for the 23rd São Paulo International Biennial (available at <http://www.23bi-ena.org.br/especial/peva.htm>; retrieved January 10, 2017), Tatiane de Oliveira Elias, "Hélio Oiticica-von Neokonkretismus zur Cosmococas", *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 49, n. 1 (2008), and Inge Hinterwaldner, "Sensorial, Supra-sensorial, Hélio Sensorial: Analyzing Oiticica in Action" cit. Flávia Cera's work on Oiticica also explores the question of possession (Arte-vida-corpo-mundo, segundo Hélio Oiticica, doctoral thesis, Florianópolis: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2012, p. 107-108).

16- Hélio Oiticica, "Estou possuído", Programa HO # 0111/67.

17- Hélio Oiticica, "HO por Ivan Cardoso" op.cit.

18- Hélio Oiticica, "HO por Ivan Cardoso", op.cit.

19- Hélio Oiticica, "HO por Ivan Cardoso", op.cit., p. 229.



20- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "O igual e o diferente", Programa HO # 0337 /70. Having found this unsigned text in Hélio Oiticica's archives, Flávia Cera checked with Viveiros de Castro to confirm he was the author.

21- See Guy Brett, "Londres, 1969", in Hélio Oiticica, *Aspiro ao grande labirinto*, Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986, p. 124.

22- Hélio Oiticica, "Ondas do corpo", *Encontros Hélio Oiticica*, Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009, p. 195.

23- Hélio Oiticica, "Ondas do corpo", op.cit., p. 195.

24- Hélio Oiticica, "Bodywise", in César Oiticica Filho e Frederico Coelho (org.), *Hélio Oiticica Conglomerado Newyorkaises*, Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2013, p. 29.

25- "LEORK", in Fred Coelho, *Livro ou livro-me. Os escritos babifônicos de Hélio Oiticica (1971-1978)*, Rio de Janeiro: EDUERJ, 2010, p. 267.

26- Flávia Cera, *Arte-vida-corpo-mundo*, segundo Hélio Oiticica, op. cit., p. 150.

27- Viveiros de Castro wrote: "For shamans, animal guises are not costumes but their means of traveling the cosmos, like diving equipment or space suits rather than carnival masks. The purpose of wearing a diving suit is to be able to breathe under water like a fish rather than disguising oneself in a strange shape. Likewise, clothes that recover an internal 'essence' of the human type are not merely disguises but their distinctive equipment endowed with the affections and abilities particular to each animal... wearing a mask-clothing is intended less to hide a human essence under an animal appearance than to activate the powers of a different body" (Our translation from "Perspectivismo e multinaturalismo na América indígena", *A inconstância da alma selvagem*, op. cit., p. 393).

28- Quoted in Flávia Cera, *Arte-vida-corpo-mundo*, segundo Hélio Oiticica, op. cit., p. 151n.

be somewhat like those the young Viveiros de Castro saw in a group of carnival merry-makers (Bloco Cacique de Ramos) on the street as they were donning their costumes. He wrote about them in a piece for *Ex-posição*, a group exhibition organized by Carlos Vergara, in 1972, featuring his series of photographs of the merry-makers: "The behavioral changes instilled by carnival come together with changes in one's own experience and concept of oneself and a changed experience of participating in the group."²⁰ Not to be forgotten is the fact that Oiticica designed his parangolés when he started attending events on Mangueira Hill²¹ and even called his capes fantasias [carnival costumes], that together with "improvised dressing"²² prompted "discovery of the body."²³ Hence his conceiving the parangolé as "structure-function":²⁴ "to construct – in-corporate – a switch from one body (mine, ours) to another, like an empty cocoon, like a loose extension that is newly embodied or newly in-corporated with each new wearing."²⁵

On revisiting Viveiros de Castro's Amerindian perspectivism theory and parangolés, Flávia Cera's thesis on Hélio Oiticica suggests that a costume "is not a ritualistic mediation [...], because the cape is a body; by wearing a cape the body is vested with a different body, a new environment and a new reality."²⁶ Perhaps, therefore, Viveiros de Castro listed Oiticica's parangolés among his sources (despite having made a relatively rigid distinction between animal guises used in Amerindian shamanism and carnival costumes – some years after writing the piece for the Vergara exhibition).²⁷ In personal conversation, Flávia Cera mentioned Viveiros de Castro, saying: "I was thinking that my idea of clothing being a body, in Indian perspectivism, comes from HO's parangolés."²⁸ In this respect, let us recall that Renato Sztutman, Silvana Nascimento and Stelio Marras asked Viveiros de Castro which roles our society would leave for non-objective but deliberate knowledge-practices such as those from shamanism. On the same lines as Lévi-Strauss in this respect, he pointed to art: "In the case of the West, it seems that wild thought has been officially confined to the luxurious prison of the art world; elsewhere it would be clandestine or 'alternative'."²⁹

Let us once again return to the photograph, our point of departure. In one single image, we catch the action of the parangolés in their varied and complementary instances: wearing, watching, wearing-watching, in-corporating/embodying. It is the juxtaposition of all these instances, which together – and only together – constitute the parangolé, that makes this image unique within the realm of images of capes in action. Going back to the question I raised earlier, I would ask whether this difference would not be due to the fact that a photographer's gaze converged with that of an anthropologist to frame the photo; a confluence of gazes capable of capturing spillover from Oiticica's work reaching beyond the strict confines of art, which Oiticica's himself had already foreseen to some extent. In one of his first writings on Parangolés, in November 1964, he emphasized that elements of dance – which at that time were "mythical par excellence" – affected the behavior of viewers. This "continuous long-range interference" could also involve "the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and history."³⁰ It would not be entirely inappropriate to say that the photograph analyzed

here may catch a crossing-over of different disciplines, a transdisciplinarity – or, more precisely, thinking of the unique ways in which Oiticica practiced his art and Viveiros de Castro, his anthropology, a transpoetics.

29- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "O chocalho do xamã é um acelerador de partículas", op. cit., p. 42.

30- Hélio Oiticica, "Bases fundamentais para um definição do 'Parangolé'", *Aspiro ao grande labirinto* op. cit., p. 68-69.



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